

# Amanda's Story

*I made a fateful decision, and one that would change my life forever, when I decided to drive home. Alcohol had completely impaired my judgement and my ability to make the correct decision.*



My name is Amanda and I'm a volunteer speaker with RTSSV. I have been working with this wonderful organisation for a couple of years now. I speak at venues in Werribee, Collingwood and Broadmeadows and work with different facilitators to get my message out there to a number of demographics. I also work with a local council where I am part of a panel of speakers.

I found myself in a terrible situation in 2008 when I was attending a celebration dinner with work colleagues. I made a fateful decision, and one that would change my life forever, when I decided to drive home. Alcohol had completely impaired my judgement and my ability to make the correct decision.

Instead I drove my car home and crashed my car into a stationary roadworks truck. When I was taken to the hospital, I was informed I had struck the road worker and he was also in hospital as he had sustained severe leg injuries. Words cannot describe the torment and guilt, nor the feeling upon hearing the words that came out of the policeman's mouth. I just screamed and screamed. I pleaded guilty immediately, as I so shamefully was.

The next 18 months of court hearings ended up with me receiving a 3.5 year jail sentence, with one year in custody and remaining term on parole. I promised myself that, as soon as I could, I would make amends and get my message out there to other offenders/potential offenders of the ripple effect of engaging in risky road behaviour and the impact it has on not only the victim and their families but the dire consequences for the perpetrator and their family.

I was a single mum and had just turned my 13 year old's world into a living hell. I couldn't believe how selfish I was to put the poor victim and his family through their own nightmare too.

I used to watch the TAC ads in the confines of my lounge room and think "how awful" as they were quite powerful, but never thought anything like that would happen to me. I was a businesswoman and had no priors. I also had already lost my mother at the age of seven to a car accident when someone ran a red light when she was on her way to work. So you think I would have known better! Road accidents and victims/perpetrators don't discriminate.

I certainly didn't go out that night intending to hurt or maim anyone, but I did and I was fully responsible for my actions.

Upon release from prison I resumed work and, whilst getting my license back after two years, went through the process of having an interlock installed. I asked the policeman how I could become involved in speaking to others. Whilst in jail I was asked to speak to a group of year 11 and 12 students and saw the impact it had on these young kids, hearing mine and another prisoner's stories. It really was powerful and a lot of the students were visibly affected by our stories.

I was named and shamed nationally on TV and newspapers which is only part of what the consequences are. And rightfully so. If you do the crime, you do the time. In saying that, it's all about being proactive and educating others first hand, so they will think long and hard and change their views of the way they look

at the road and the weapon they are driving and responsible for. Driving is a privilege not a right. My now 18 year old has only recently shown interest in getting his license as he was significantly impacted and quite scared to drive.

Each and every session I attend, I am amazed at how the opinions and perceptions of the attendees change after just 2.5 hours.

I have been to many sessions where there are a few arrogant, naive and cavalier attitudes among the attendees at commencement. The repeat offenders that attend astound me, but after the RTSSV sessions I'd say 90 per cent have a very different outlook. You can't change everyone but if you change just one, then it's all worth bringing up the painful story.

A highlight for me was when one man had tears in his eyes and told me whenever he looks at his keys or car he will remember my story and that will stay with him forever. I have also had many attendees come up to me and convey their thanks for sharing my story. It's such a great feeling seeing the change when they first walk in to when they leave.

I would like to see RTSSV working more in the high schools as this is where we can possibly have a more proactive outcome, before some of these potential drivers become victims or perpetrators. I would also like to see more sponsors and fundraising events for the RTSSV as it is imperative this organisation continues to do the amazing work they do.

I am very passionate about what I do- speaking to others, young and old about the ripple effect of their behaviour on the road.